

Privilege—Mr. Lang

The House is about to be presented with hundreds of millions of dollars of supplementary estimates. I directed a line of questioning, as did my colleagues today, to the President of the Treasury Board. In my second question I asked if the minister was prepared, as an interim measure, to recommend to his colleagues that at least one department be brought back into the House for examination by committee of the whole, without limitation under Standing Order 58, which is the guillotine rule. I was careful to preface my question by saying that notwithstanding the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, which is now seized with drafting a report to the House on rule changes, I would nevertheless go ahead with my question based upon what I consider to be the urgency of the matter, which is the presentation of the estimates to the House, and the evidence given by the Auditor General and his department with regard to the fact that the House and parliament as a whole have lost control over government spending.

I wanted the minister to take leadership and recommend this to his colleagues since he has responsibility to parliament for government spending as President of the Treasury Board, and to recommend on a trial basis that the estimates be brought back into committee of the whole.

I raise this matter because we are all concerned that since the rule changes we have unwittingly become a rubber stamp for government spending. The word is out that parliament has lost control over government spending, and this is a serious matter. Since the new rules came into effect in 1968 government spending has increased by over 300 per cent, yet we as a parliament have no control. The minister should take some initiative in this regard. I know he shares the same concern, as does the Auditor General and as does the Public Accounts Committee. My question to him was merely to suggest that perhaps the supplementary estimates and the main estimates for this year could be brought back into the House since it is evident that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization will not act upon this unless there is some direction from the government. I should like to hear from the minister on this.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please, I am sure the hon. member would like to hear from the minister, but he is referring to a situation where the Chair had to make a ruling on the propriety of the question. The question was directed to the President of the Treasury Board, who is intimately concerned with the presentation of estimates and the whole process. But the question was directed to a change in the procedures of the House. It is not a new suggestion and it may have great merit. As the hon. member has developed his point, it would find sympathy in several corners of the House. A fuller examination of the estimates on the floor of the House may be a better way than that followed in the recent past.

My decision was based on the fact that for the purposes of explanation it is a procedural matter that has considerable support, and not a matter of substance with respect to estimates, which is the responsibility of the President of the Treasury Board. As a procedural matter it seems to me the

[Mr. McGrath.]

question might better have been directed to the President of the Privy Council, the government House leader. I am sure such questions will be put in due course and other efforts will be made in the Committee on Procedure and Organization to see that estimates are examined in this way. I felt it was not within the administrative competence of the President of the Treasury Board.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, as this is Wednesday and we will not be here at the usual time to ask about business of the House, may I ask the Acting House Leader, the Postmaster General (Mr. Blais), about the government's legislative program for next week?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we will proceed today with Bill C-19, the expenditures restraint bill, and we fully expect it will be dealt with until six o'clock this evening. We do not expect it to be completed today so we will come back to that bill on Monday.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, is the minister in a position to advise what legislation will follow that at the beginning of the week? While he is thinking about that, could he advise if the government is aware now when the supplementary estimates will be brought in? There has been some interesting discussion with respect to this.

Finally, although he has not direct control over it himself, would the Postmaster General bring to the attention of the government House leader the fact that the Public Accounts Committee has not yet been organized? Would he urge the government House leader to take some action with respect to that, particularly in view of the fact that, unfortunate as it may seem, there has not been a House leaders' meeting called since the first one in the second week of this parliament? It was erroneously reported in *Maclean's* magazine that we manage to meet every week, but that is not so. I should like to meet every week, but it is not the case. Could the minister take these questions to the government House leader wherever he is so that we can get on with the business of the House?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, with reference to the supplementary estimates I shall be presenting a motion which refers the supplementary estimates in the usual form during routine proceedings today.

With reference to the business for Monday, Bill C-19 is exciting a great deal of interest and I expect it will continue to excite a great deal of interest. We propose to carry on with this legislation and dispose of it. If, through greater co-operation than we have had in the past, we can dispose of the bill prior to Tuesday, we would proceed with the Surveys Act. We would then consult with my hon. friend on any additional legislation that we might want to present subsequently.